

El Clima Magazine

September 2014- Changes

- Written by Peace Corps Ecuador Volunteers for the Peace Corps Community -



From the Editors

Welcome to the newest edition of *El Clima Magazine*—your quarterly digital magazine written, organized, and published by Peace Corps Ecuador Volunteers for the greater Peace Corps Community.

Change has been the only constant this past year within Peace Corps Ecuador. In the front office, we welcomed a new country director, director of training, and director of operations, while saying farewell to both Nurse Kelly and Officer Julieta. For PCVs,

in addition to personal change, restrictions on travel to Guayaquil were modified, monthly personal days extended, and readjustment allowances increased. Lastly, Omnibus 111 and 112 were added to our ranks, the former including the final group of natural resource conservation volunteers.

El Clima Magazine has changed as well. We welcome a new editing and writing team, a new design, and a renewed mission and vision. By focus-

ing more intensely on PC's Third Goal, *El Clima* hopes to broaden both its viewership and impact.

For this, we will need your help. First, we invite you to share your story of being a Peace Corps Ecuador Volunteer by submitting photos and articles. Second, we encourage you to share *El Clima* beyond the borders of Ecuador with family, friends, and others in the States.

With gratitude,
El Clima E-Team

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Cover Photos: Omnibus 112 swear-in, Andean flowers, Cocoa factory tour, Cuenca Corpus Christi sweet treats

El Clima is a digital magazine written, organized, and published by Peace Corps Ecuador Volunteers for the greater Peace Corps Community.

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Top Ten Tips for the Newbies

By Chris Owen

Welcome Omnibus 112! And congratulations on swearing in as our newest PCVs in Ecuador. To help give you a leg up, current volunteers have compiled ten top notch tips to help you make a successful transition to your new sites. Enjoy and good luck!

1. Red wine and dark chocolate mend just about anything. Take care of yourself and treat yourself when you need it. In my experience, you can't be an effective volunteer without being your healthy self. –Ali O.

2. Bring a book with you everywhere, as you will likely have down time when meetings don't start on time, buses are delayed, people are late for meetings, etc. –Josh B.

3. High hopes and low expectations are the key to keeping your sanity! Recognize every judgmental thought you have and reframe it. Don't be too hard on yourself. Also, the first year can have some

really low lows. Take your personal time and see your friends. –Jonathan F.

4. Chances are you may not make a LEGIT Ecua-fwend until you're about 7 months to a year into service—no matter how cool you were back in the States. But that's oootay, give it tiiiime; and just keep being you, baby gul/boi. –Fatimah C.

5. Don't start planning a project before you get to your site. At all. Not even an idea. Because you know nothing of what the people want yet. Get there and listen and discuss, then start forming ideas. –Kristina B.

6. Don't rush. Walk slowly. –John B.

7. Don't feel obligated to fall in the footsteps of the previous volunteer, especially if they were a town favorite. Carve out your own niche and ways to be noticed so that you aren't just a copy. But if those volunteers did something super great that you want to try, do it. –Rachel C.

8. Accept as many invitations to social gatherings as you can. Putting your face out there as someone willing to take the time to eat *almuerzo* at someone's home or shake your booty at a *quinceañera* will foster those important connections you'll need later to start projects in your community. You'll also create long-lasting memories that will enrich your time here in Ecuador. –Kristin F.

9. Every PCV experience is different. No two services are the same. So just keep living your experience and enjoying your journey. –Chris O.

10. For the love of God, cherish it! –Tabitha K.



11. Bonus: Don't download any movie beforehand that stars Vin Diesel, the Rock, or Jason Statham. You will see all of them on the bus. –Henry H.

Long Live Christ's Corpse!

By Todd Hemelstrand

On the 22nd of June, Pujilí held their annual Corpus Christi festival.

It's celebrated to honor the Holy Communion and is celebrated with a large parade, music, dancing and, of course, drinking.

Though I don't live in Pujilí, the week before the parade, my friend asked me to dance in the *desfilé* with him and his high school.

I was happy to accept the invitation and showed up at his house early Saturday

morning. There we ate a giant breakfast to "give us the necessary strength" to make it through the day. We gorged ourselves on *jugo de carne con huevos tibios* or meat juice with soft-boiled eggs.

We donned our *ponchos*, indigenous hats and pounds of sunscreen, and then we were out the door.

Eventually, we arrived at the starting point of the parade. My position was up front with my friend and three teachers of the school. I asked how I was supposed to dance.

Even though I had accepted the invitation to be in the parade, I realized, last minute, that I had no idea what I was supposed to do.

But the instructions given to me were simple: dance the way the music makes you feel.

Clearly the *gringo* heard the music differently than the rest of the group. There was a lot of arm-flailing and shuffling to the beat from this guy.

The people dancing around me—high school students' parents also participating in the parade—had large stalks of sugarcane.

I don't care to remember how many times I got hit in the face by the long leaves as they danced and swung those canes.

Throughout the parade, my friend darted around yelling to the crowds, passing out drinks and enlivening the on-lookers—the Ecuadorian equivalent to a hype man. This left me out front, and at times, it



Todd amidst the Corpus Christi festivities with locals holding sugarcane

appeared like a *gringo* was leading the high school in the parade.

In these frantic moments, I would yell to the crowd the same thing I had heard many times before, “*Viva Corpus Christi*” to which the crowd responded “*Viva!*”

It felt odd yelling, “Long live Christ’s corpse,” but when in Pujilí, do as they Pujilense do...

Dancing under the strong equatorial sun for more than two hours accompanied with copious amounts of *Pájaro Azul* really took its toll on us. At the terminus of the parade, we were exhausted.

We congratulated one another and made our way back to where my friends were watching the ongoing parade.

I finally was able to sit down and was just about to eat lunch when my friend informed me that the dance team from his high school would be passing by and we should support them by parading with them.

Sure, why not?

Then I realized what I had gotten myself into. Our small gesture of support turned into another two hours of dancing.

People immediately recognized the indigenously-clad *gringo*, and no doubt wondered why he was taking a second lap.

This time the dance was a bit different. Every 10 minutes, we had to stop and pick people out of the crowd to dance with. This was incredibly awkward, and I tried to only pick women who would be eligible for AARP.

At the end of the second lap, my legs were noodles and weren’t going to support me much longer. Finally, we returned to our friends who were watching the last bit of the proces-

sion.

Once the parade ended, we all went indoors for dinner. A bowl of chicken soup and fried pork awaited us. *Fritada* has never tasted so good.

Over dinner, my friend and I reflected on the day and entertained our friends with our tales (some of them taller than others).

As we spoke, I realized that this is what integration feels like. Even though I didn’t even live in Pujilí, I felt like a part of the community.

It is hard to believe that this was my second *Corpus Christi* and I won’t be here for the next one. I don’t know where the time has gone. I suppose as long as it is spent making memories like this, it really doesn’t matter.



High school students lead the Corpus Christi parade

I < 3 Earthworms

By Kristin Farr

I've always had an affinity for insects; mostly for their aesthetics. "Bugs" are infinitely interesting and never cease to amaze me. They fill in the gaps in the food chain, clean up our messes and are an integral part of our survival on earth.

Worms, however, are not insects but rather a "non-arthropod invertebrate animal." But that's a mouthful, so they're simply referred to as "worms." There are over 9,000



Kerry with worms and food scraps

types of worms in the world which are divided up in to phyla by specific characteristics. The term "worm" brings an image of an earthworm for most; also for us PCVs, the term "worms" conjures up a mental image of intestinal variety.

Earthworms are responsible for clean-up duty by decomposing waste. This process improves the nutrients of soil and their burrowing helps loosen the soil for the roots of plants. The waste they produce is called "humus"; no not hummus that delicious chickpea purée we eat with pita chips. Humus, or worm poop, is organic waste that has passed through the digestive system of the earthworm and comes out as nutrient-rich, decomposed waste broken down and ready to be absorbed into the roots of plants. Yum!

For NRCers, worm beds (or *lombricultura* here in Ecuador) is a great project to do in your community, particularly with school children. It's easy to set

up and maintain, requires little resources, provides a useful form of compost for your gardens, and has tangible results.

Up in the Quito office, Kerry, the PCVL for the health program, inherited some worms that were in pretty bad shape. Tucked in a forgotten corner on the office grounds sat an old trashcan with dry dirt and tiny hair-like earthworms. She began saving and collecting the organic waste from our apartment and transporting the slimy and fuzzy trash to the office to "feed" them. It has been four months, and those earthworms are now living the high-life. I asked Kerry for some tips and opinions about earthworms so I can share it with my fellow NRCers. The following is a transcript of our conversation:

Kristin: "Kerry, what sort of digs should earthworms have if one plans on having a *proyecto de lombricultura*?"

Kerry: "It's best to have a longer container rather

than a tall one. In a long container, when you're ready to harvest the humus, you can push the undigested peels to one side, exposing the nutrient-rich humus to be used in your garden."

Kristin: "Why are there so many flies when I take the top off ours here at the office? Is that bad?"

Kerry: "Chill out Kristin, they're just fruit flies. To get rid of those, all we have to do is turn over the waste in the container more often. Otherwise, they're not hurting the worms."

Kristin: "I love our worms, Kerry, and I stay up at night worrying about their safety and health. Any tips on keeping our beloved worms safe and healthy?"

Kerry: "We can't let them overheat, flood or freeze. We should always keep them in a covered container and store it in a shady area. Also, we should never give them things with oil (takes longer to decompose), meat (will attract pesky animals and make it stinky), or highly acidic fruits (it damages their skin!)."

Kristin: "You did some sort of sorcery on our worms because they were once so tiny and almost dead and now they're fat and happy. How did you do that?"

Kerry: "I just fed them! Especially fruit and vegetable peels."

Kristin: "Weren't you scared they would just die?"

Kerry: "I knew they would fight back, they're resilient little critters."

Kristin: "Describe these worms in one word."

Kerry: "Beautiful."

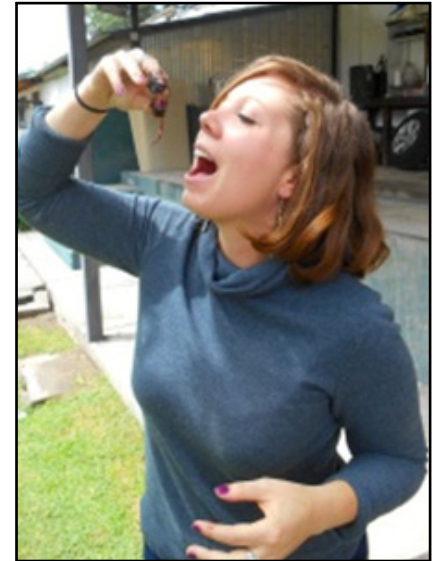
Kristin: "I would have said 'gorgeous'... pot-ay-to/pot-ah-to. Anything you'd like

to say to the NRCers out there?"

Kerry: "Come up to the Quito office to say 'hi' and grab some worms! We've got plenty!"

Kristin: "One last question. Are these edible?"

Kerry: "Um...no."



(A) Kristin dangling a worm
(B) Finished worm compost



Ecuador: Life In Three Parts

By Erin Bohler

The Coast
Melissa Gonzalez
“Hey Chicos!”

The Sierra
Kristin Farr
“Last Woman Standing”

The Amazon
Noah Smith
“The Perfect Man”

Do you live with a family or on your own? Can you describe your home?

MG: I live on the first floor of a three-story cement house. The owners are constructing the second floor as a separate apartment and the top floor is left open to enjoy the view of the ocean to the west and the mountains to the east.

KF: I live with another PCVL who is like family. Our landlady and her family live in our building, which makes it akin to having a host-family with little contact. Our home is an apartment built in the '70s with terraces and balconies that afford us great views of Pichincha and the city of Quito.

NS: I live on my own but in a *cuarto* on the floor above my old host-family, so I still see them quite a bit. My quarters are just a very simple room with a bathroom and stove on a table and a small counter and sink that functions as a kitchen.

What do people usually wear in your site?

MG: The typical dress of my region is what you would expect in the coast: women wear shorts or leggings and a nice tank top or t-shirt, and men wear shorts or pants and either a t-shirt or no shirt. Everyone wears flip-flops or sandals no matter what job they are doing, whether it is working in the mangroves or building a house.

KF: Adults usually dress conservatively and professionally. Youngsters often like to show off these latest trends, which could be some psychedelic lycras and a sweater with high heels or sexy boots for the ladies and ripped jeans and a fashionable scarf with rad boots for the fellas.

NS: Casually dressed women tend to wear short sleeves or tank tops and either short-shorts or jeans, while men will wear a button down shirt with jeans and black shoes.

The Coast
Melissa Gonzalez

The Sierra
Kristin Farr

The Amazon
Noah Smith

What foods are typical in your region?

MG: Typical dishes in Las Gilces contain crops from the community and freshly-caught seafood prepared right from the ocean, including *ceviche*, *viche*, shrimp, fish, or crab, served with a side of rice, fried or sweet plantains, and salad. Farmers in Las Gilces typically harvest rice, corn, melon, onion, tomato, peppers, and coconut, and fisherman capture sardine, shrimp, or crabs, which are common in typical dishes.

KF: *Platos típicos* still include your traditional Sierran fare like *arroz*, *papas*, *pollo/chancho* and of course a *sopa*. Quito, however, is a city of plenty, so *ceviche* and *encocado*, to real *chifa* to something more exotic like a legit American burger or sandwich can be enjoyed on a PC budget.

NS: As far as food, there is a lot *platano* and *yuca* in this region. We like our *empanadas de verde*. I have heard in some other towns of the province some Ecuadorians eat frogs and ants (depending on the season).

Do you shop for food? If you do, where do you go to buy it?

MG: There is an early morning Sunday market a few towns over from Las Gilces that sells fresh fruits and vegetables, seafood, cheese, and other items. In Portoviejo, an hour away, there are a couple of grocery stores for packaged items. Community members are also very generous and frequently give me fresh fruits and vegetables from their gardens, as well as eggs, freshly-caught fish, shrimp, and crabs.

KF: We love looking up recipes we've never tried and shopping for those ingredients. The bulk of our shopping is done at Supermaxi because they can't charge us the *precio gringo*. We'll supplement some items at the *tienda* (mostly just Pilsener and eggs.)

NS: I shop for food at the local daily market or at the large community market that takes place on Sundays, but if I need something special I often have to travel to Loja (three hours away) if I want to get it.

Farming on the coast



The Coast
Melissa Gonzalez

The Sierra
Kristin Farr

The Amazon
Noah Smith

What do people in your area do on Sunday?

MG: On Sunday, many people go to the market early in the morning and then come home to spend time with the family. They also finish up some household chores or play sports. The youth of the community hang out with their friends and go to the beach or play sports.

KF: On Sundays, crowds of people fill the malls to shop or watch a movie, play *fútbol* in one of the many parks, go to church, ride their bikes on the *Ciclo Paseo*, or do what we do: stay at home and watch pirated DVDs while making *artesanía reciclada*.

NS: Sundays are pretty lazy days. Stores open late and restaurants are only open for lunch. Most people don't work and hang out with their families. The main event is the regional market that takes place in Yantzaza. On Sunday, I do laundry, take a run, and plan for the week.

How do you wash your clothes?

MG: There are no *pedras de lavar* at my site. The majority of people wash by hand in round bins called *tinas*. A few people have their own washing machines, but even so, they wash the clothes by hand first and then throw it into the washing machine to make sure the clothes are extra clean.

KF: I wash my clothes in a washer and dryer.

NS: I, and almost everyone else in Yantzaza, wash clothes by hand on a *pedra* in my building that I share with my neighbors. It's a lot of work.

Noah before washing his clothes



A Paper Heart Chronicle

By Hannah Moore

I recently cried over a paper heart and it changed everything.

A paper heart of jagged notebook paper, crumbled and reopened, cut and folded. It was handed to me in the center of the San Vincente cancha, a place where I spend the majority of my time either wearing lycra and playing soccer or wearing lycra and exercising my women's group or wearing lycra and eating flan in a plastic lawn chair (that was a special day).

The hours leading up to my paper heart meltdown began with my customary pre-breakfast watching of YouTube workout videos. I plan my 8 o'clock workouts with meticulously drawn stick figures doing burpees or mountain climbers because in the midst of my hour-long Jillian Michael's performance at the cancha with five reluctant Arenillas women, I forget what the Spanish words I wrote down mean, forcing me to make up something ridicu-

lous on the spot like neck rolls. However, my stick figures and mid-calf power socks are often not needed, for the women sporadically fail to show due to a plethora of excuses: it's a little too cold outside, or it's a little too hot, or they have to get their hair colored, or one of the babies is sad today, or there is an excavator digging up the sewer pipe and the whole town's watching—even the mayor's going! I am a pretty easygoing soul; I love a good excavator show just as much as the next person. Nobody's got time for a light jog or jump squats when there is a 10-ton yellow machine down the street. However, that day, the lack of attendance wore me down a bit after I had memorized 15 different yoga moves with the accompanying Spanish vocabulary only to be left in the living room of a woman in my group watching a *telenovela* from 1997.

Two hours and four episodes of "Tres Mujeres" later, I found myself back at home being hounded by my host-brother who loves

to ask me about what I am doing in Ecuador, if I ever work, and loves to remind me that my Spanish is similar to a 2nd grader's. I find nothing more deflating than the assumption that I don't know that my Spanish needs work. I am aware. I recently went up to a restaurant owner in hopes of a spoon and accidentally asked for a knife. I spent the rest of my meal eating with my hands in shame, my knife lying ominously next to my plate.

Shamed from my host-brother's consistent jokes, I went to the *coliseo* to teach basketball. The first time my eyes fell on this building, I was amazed. It has a roof, two semi-working goals, bleachers, and a unisex bathroom. I was giddy to have this space to teach basketball; however, I would soon realize that my visions were only illusions, illusions that disregarded the dark shadows that hundreds of pigeons used to hide in and conspire together. The first week I was in Arenillas, I was pooped on four out of the five times I went to the

coliseo. Of the 25 kids and one other instructor, I was the only one to be targeted.

The day of the paper heart, the coach asked me to play 5-on-5 with the kids since we were lacking in numbers due to an excavator down the street. More than happy to play, I began shuffling and running down the court, laughing and joking, completely forgetting about the day's inconsistencies until it happened. I slipped in a fresh pile of pigeon droppings and slid right through the spot that the kids deem the black hole of the court. It is the place where all of the birds perch above and defecate on. When I stood up, I was surely a sight. My knee was torn, and splotches of white and black dotted my body. The kids surrounded me, some laughing, others wide-eyed and quiet, waiting on my broken Spanish speech concerning my turn for the worst. I shrugged it off with a half-smile, but inside, I was disheartened and screaming obscenities. There was no opportunity for me to change my clothes before my youth group. The damage had been done and it was there

to stay.

As I trudged up the hill to my youth group, my heart was heavy and my life back home was on my mind. The pigeon poop, the Spanish speaking, and the presence of the town's excavator weighed on my shoulders with such power that I began to feel incapable of succeeding. My perseverance, at that moment, felt non-existent.

Once I dragged myself to the middle of the court with pigeon poop baking on my back in the Arenillas heat, I sat down in defeat. The few kids that were there were too distracted by the *chifle* bag being passed around to notice me. From behind, I heard someone call my name. It was a 10 year old named Cheeky, one of my favorites in my youth group that I hadn't seen in a while. The week prior, I watched him scold an older boy for throwing a rock at a girl because "you need to be nice to girls because they are pretty and you shouldn't be mean to them."

He told me that he hadn't been able to come to the

youth group because he had been helping his parents do some work at the house.

"*Está bien,*" I told him, "*Estoy emocionada que puedes venir hoy día.*"

"*Pues...No puedo Hannah. Necesito ayudar mi familia otra vez,*" he responded, head down, "*pero, hice eso para usted.*"

He pulled out a paper heart.

"*Hice eso para usted en mi clase porque quise venir a su grupo porque es mi parte favorita de mi día.*"

I was transfixed on this second period creation laying flat in palm. The whole day sped quickly through my mind; the absent women, my internal struggle with a foreign language, the distance of friends and family, the excavator, the pigeons rallying against me, my strong desire to just turn around and go home.

I threw my hands over my face as tears began to pour down. I can only imagine how insane I looked to those on the court because

I felt equally as insane internally. I hardly ever get worked up enough to cry. The whole day had culminated up to that point of that paper heart catharsis, and I could not control my breakdown. Through the folds of the *corazón*, I realized that I was wanted here; that despite my downtrodden emotions and negative thoughts, there was a shining light that reminded me why I was in Arenillas: my goals, my beliefs, my reasoning for facing those over-fed pigeons Monday through Friday. My failures of the previous 10 hours dissolved with my dried tears. In that paper heart, I learned what every Peace Corps volunteer eventually learns in his or her own way: that this experience is not only for the Cheekys, the women that I make run up a hill every Tuesday, or the people of Arenillas that I hope to positively impact in the next two years; it is for all of us to grow, to learn about ourselves as we teach others, to be able to accept the good and the bad with a grain of salt and the knife that should have been a spoon.

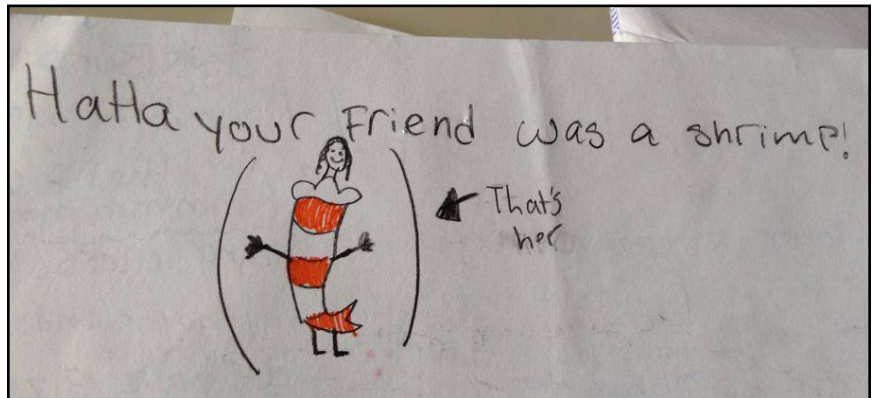
Cheeky's friend Carlitos

came up as my tears subsided and asked in a faint whisper, "Que pasó?"

I heard Cheeky squeak, hiding his face behind his shoulder, "No pienso que ella le gusta mi corazón."

I lifted my head, laughing, wiping the tears from my face, "Me encanta esta corazón. I love it, Cheeky. Gracias."

I recently cried over a paper heart, and it changed everything.



(A) A student's note (B) Hannah performs at an event for youth



Inti Raymi Welcomes The Solstice

By Rachel Childs

Normally, the town of Cotacachi is quiet—like most places in the Sierran region of Ecuador.

The bustling market full of bartering customers who want less for their bunches of bananas is the loudest part of the area, next to men shouting locations in the bus terminal.

“Otavalo, Quiroga. *Siga, siga, por favor,*” bus attendants shout out of the entrance doors.

But the terminal is nothing compared to the decibel level of the communities above Cotacachi. Especial-

ly when the summer solstice festival known as Inti Raymi comes around.

The third week of June marks the summer solstice and the beginning of the seasonal harvest. And that means celebration.

Every year, indigenous communities in *los cantones* in the province of Imbabura take Inti Raymi to new levels.

On this day, they pause from agriculture and community work to represent their town in full force.

Cotacachi’s main square fills up with spectators from neighboring com-

munities which include La Calera, Morales Chupa, Morocho, Saint Nicholas, Topo and others.

Each community, mostly men and boys, wear chaps made of llama wool or cowhide or traditional white pants and shirts with blue ponchos.

Others opt for army fatigues and large, black hats covered in religious and spiritual symbols and walk to the center to represent their town.

The low hum of voices becomes stronger as the participants of the parade get closer. Spectators gather on the pavement until the stampede floods into the main park.

Sun-soaked bodies are tired from the hour of marching, but do not show it because it is their time to make their community stand out.

Voices are so strong that people can barely discern the words as two or three communities take to the square at one time.



Male participants of the Inti Raymi parade march in llama wool chaps

The marching representatives from each *canton* are at times more than 200 people with periodical stopping points during which time some marchers dance in a hurricane formation.

Flute and keyboard players keep the two-step beat. When they tire, the people use their voices and feet.

A break after the first round allows for communities to share food made by older residents. Traditional dishes include rice, beans, chicken, beef, and soft, puffy corn known as *mote*.

Hydration comes from a fermented drink made from corn flour and at times, pineapple juice.

Often, the participants can be seen with clear bottles of liquor known as *trago*, a technically illegal moonshine. As the day progresses, this results in several men falling to the ground or requiring their wives to hold them up.

The time for each group is restricted to one hour due to past feuds. Security lines up with riot gear and



Children join the festivities wearing traditional dress

bombas, or pepper spray, ready in case of flying fists and rocks.

This year, twice, the *bombas* are used to disperse the crowd after rowdy behavior; a full fight briefly breaks out around 5 pm of the celebration.

Later, buses fill as families rush to catch the last few headed to smaller communities.

Other groups take to the pavement and walk or stomp back to their homes for a well-deserved nap or more celebration.

At night, the men and teens go door-to-door with instruments to continue the circle dance. Neighbors meet the eager musicians with food and drink to sat-

isfy hunger and cure hangovers.

But at the end of June, the normal routine returns. Agriculture resumes, markets sell the harvested goods, and bus attendants continue to shout their destinations. The town and mountains of Cotacachi are quiet again.

Inti Raymi dishes



You're a PCV in Ecuador When...

By Nicolina Trifunovski

1. You talk about your bowel movements with as much ease as you do the weather.
2. You start craving things like *ceviches*, *humitas*, *hornados*, *tostadas* and *encebollados*.
3. You've actually learned to like squeaky cheese and—gasp!—crave it.
4. Speaking in English with other volunteer friends becomes an actual scheduled event.
5. Toilet paper in the trash is all the rage these days.
6. You have pet giant bugs that will sometimes even ask you to scratch their bellies.

7. One of your biggest fears is not catching the gas tank trunk when it goes by.
8. You are aghast that your friend had to pay \$1 for 12 oranges instead of the usual 25 oranges.
9. A 4-hour-long bus ride is no longer a big deal.
10. You've become an expert at not using the bathroom for long periods of time because of those long bus rides.
11. You have peed outside in public in broad daylight... or at least have contemplated doing so.
12. You have learned to stop asking people for directions because you realize that you probably know

more than they do about where something is.

13. You argue with the cab driver because you know he's trying to charge you the *gringo* price.

14. You argue with the vendors because you know they are trying to charge you the *gringo* price.

15. You now know how to kill a chicken and prepare it for a meal.

16. You've been accused of trying to steal someone's husband or wife at least once.

17. A breath of fresh air in the morning includes a dose of pollution and/or ash.

18. Your shower catches on fire or almost does.

19. You've electrocuted yourself by touching the shower handle at least a couple of times.

20. You show up a half-hour late to your own meeting and still manage to be the earliest one there.



Market-day fruits and vegetables sold to a PCV at the *gringo* price

Cuerpo de Paseo

By Erin Fischer

“You’re coming on the end of the year *paseo*, right?!”

When my teachers asked me this shortly after arriving at my site, I got excited and started imagining eating the region’s famous *cholas* in Guano, hanging out with monkeys in Tena, or maybe even a longer trek to bask in the sun in Atacames.

“Absolutely! Just tell me when and where and I’ll have my bags packed!”

That’s when I learned I would be seeing monkeys, eating *mariscos*, and relaxing on the beach; however, not in Ecuador. My English area had been recycling paper all year to fund their trip to Punto Sal, Peru.

As much as I had been looking forward to visiting a new Ecuadorian vacation destination, I was stoked to be going to Peru!

The days leading up to our trip were filled with excitement that carried us through the eight-hour bus

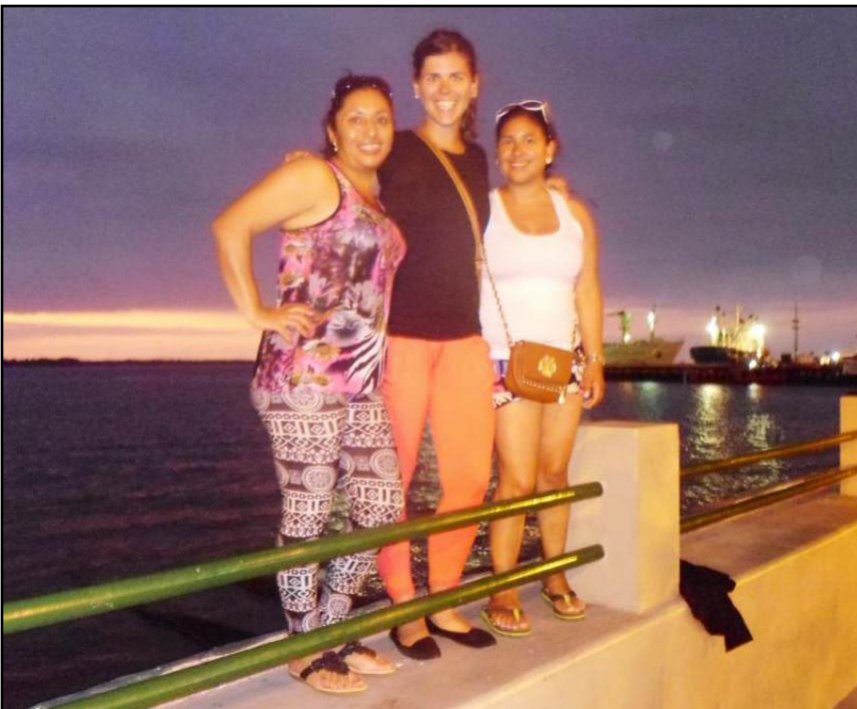
ride to Huaquillas, past border control, and the final two hours to Punto Sal.

The next 72 hours were spent sharing endless *cachos* (jokes), eating (So. Much. Food.), and really getting to know each other outside the professional walls of our *colegio*.

One memorable experience was going kayaking with two of my teachers who had never even been in a boat before. I had so much fun trying to teach them how to kayak; however, there was definitely a moment or two when we thought they would be lost at sea and sending SOS messages in a bottle.

We laughed until our guts ached, especially when the waves threw us all from our kayaks as we returned to shore.

After leaving Punto Sal, we had a whirlwind of stops on our way back to Riobamba—really making the most of our adventure before returning to the “real world.”



Erin with two co-teachers in northern Peru

We experienced the simultaneous patriotic ceremonies that the Peruvian and Ecuadorian militaries perform at the border of Huacillas and Aguas Verdes every Sunday morning.

We took pictures with giant miner statues during our ice cream break in Las Piñas.

In Zaruma, after drinking some delicious coffee, we explored old mines. Everyone got a kick out of dressing up in the rubber boots, hard hats, and head lamps.

Our last stop before boarding the dreaded bus back to Friobamba included hanging out on the *malecon*, boardwalk, in Machala with some mouth-watering *ceviche de camerones*.

As much as I loved the kayaking, catameras, and cheap border clothes, the most meaningful part of our trip was getting to know my teachers on a deeper, more personal level and letting them see a different side of me. I am already looking forward to next year's *paseo*. Word on the street is Colombia is on the itinerary!



(A) A military procession takes part behind Erin and two counterparts
(B) The group prepares to go underground



Black Is Beautiful

By Jazzy Oshitoye

“*Tú eres morena. Tú eres fea.*”

“You’re black. You’re ugly.”

Day 1 of arriving to my host-family’s house during in-country Peace Corps training, these were the words spat in my face by a little girl.

The circumstances under which they were said at least made the hostility understandable. My new host-niece had just gotten in trouble. Little kids sometimes lash out when

that happens. But her words still stung.

The next day, I wrote to God about it in my diary.

Sunday, January 20, 2013

To: God

She said that I was *morena* and that the previous volunteer they’d had (who’s Caucasian) was beautiful and I was *fea*. She repeated it many times because I couldn’t understand, and when I looked it up, I was so hurt, I almost cried.

Thank You for helping me hold it in.

Afterward, I asked her if she didn’t like me because of my skin.

She said yes.

I didn’t know what to do, and I felt like somehow, I’d failed already.

God, will I be dealing with this kind of discrimination for two years?

I am a first-generation American—my mother is Filipina and my father was born in England. His parents are from Barbados and Nigeria. My skin is brown and beautiful.

Up until this point, I’d been enamored with Ecuador and my Peace Corps experience. Learning Spanish had been my biggest challenge.

I hadn’t fully considered what my Peace Corps experience would be like through the lens of being black. But three days after arriving to the first foreign country I’d ever been to, I found myself staring into the face of an 8-year-old girl, being called ugly for



Jazzy laughs after having her face pushed into a birthday cake by students

my skin.

Later, I met the volunteer who'd lived with my host-family before me. She told me that the little girl had actually called her ugly too. Somehow, I felt better. Uneasy. But better. I considered it a minor trial. One little girl thinks I'm ugly. I can deal with that.

But my proximity to racism was not to remain distant.

After completing training and swearing in as an official Peace Corps Volunteer, I was placed in Loja, Ecuador with a new, in-site host-family. With a little time, I started to notice little things that reminded me of my worries about discrimination:

- In my host-family's house, most of the pictures on the walls were of Caucasians. (No relations—just random posters/pictures of Caucasians.)
- I noticed that my host-mother either scowled or laughed when she saw black people walking past.
- I realized that every time my host-mother described



Jazzy visits Cuenca to attend various despedidas with and of PCVs

a person as *negro* (Spanish for “black”), the next adjective was always, without fail, *feo* (“ugly”).

Eventually, despite the odds, I built something of a relationship with my host-mother, with whom I had the most concern.

When she mentioned something about a *negro* and *feo* again, I decided it was time this got sorted out.

“Hey... I was talking to Papá about this... He said that there are a lot of racist people in Loja. Is that true? What do you think?”

“Oh yes. Definitely. It's terrible. For me—I'm just scared of them though.”

“Why?”

“They're not good. They come here from other countries and they steal and you see them on the

news... I'm scared of them. When I see them on the bus, I hold my things like this—” her arms went stiff and flew to her chest. She held them there so tightly, they seemed fused to her body.

I explained that her comments were hard for me because I was black too.

“Oh no. But not you—you're *buena gente*,” she said. (*Buena gente* means, loosely, “of the good sort”; “a good person.”)

Feeling as though my point was not being understood, I tried again to get her to look at things through eyes surrounded by dark skin. But either my level of Spanish or my new ideas were obstacles too big to surmount.

That night, I wrote to God in anguish.

Thursday, October 24, 2013

To: God
My heart feels like it's bleeding and all I want to do is sit here wailing to the heavens, crying.

My people, God! These are my brothers and sisters we're talking about, God. These are Your children we're talking about. Every face is precious and unique and every person has something loveable in their heart.

How could someone cross that out so quickly?

What makes dark so feared—so hated—by so many?

Every black man could be my father. Every black adolescent could be my brother. Every black woman is me—as I was, as I am, as I will be.

How can I be happy when people are judging my fathers and my brothers and my grandmothers?

How can I be content if I made it into the *buena gente* circle, but the rest of the family is on the outside, looking in, caged and barred by the steel trap stereotypes that label them

as robbers, murderers, and sinners?

In my despair, in addition to God, I talked to my friends.

Some of those friends were members of Peace Corps Ecuador's ethnic and religious minority support group called FREE (*Fomentando Relaciones Etnicas y Etnicas*), which I'm involved in too. When I shared my story, they empathized. They listened to my story and shared their own stories of struggles with racism. They offered what support they could.

I would like to say that my host-mother now loves all black people and that a big smile suddenly spreads on her face when she sees them walking on the sidewalk.

I would like to say that the little girl now believes that black is beautiful.

But I can't.

I have found comfort in the words of my friends and the support of my God, but not in a cinematic happy ending.

What I know, however, is that my host-mother has a decent relationship with one black person. I know that she considers one black person *buena gente*.

I know that the little girl runs up to me and hugs me when I visit my used-to-be host-family.

And I know that I am stronger for this experience. I have cried mightily for everyone who has and will go through this experience of being feared, disliked, or even hated for their appearance; but I did not dry up and wither away. I am still here. I can still live here and work and show others that black does not equal bad.

I know that my presence here influences those around me. It may mold their perceptions or test their opinions. I can only hope that those with prejudices will see me and learn to celebrate the colors brown and black and dark. When they do, they'll hear shouts of praise. If there's one thing that Peace Corps has taught me, it's that a change made, however small, is a change worth celebrating.

Clubs

Spectrum

Spectrum is Ecuador's LGBTQ support group. It comprises self-identified lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and queer PCVs as well as allies. We meet quarterly and are focused on providing support and friendship among LGBTQ PCVs and providing a safe space to discuss LGBTQ challenges while serving in Ecuador. Further, we aim to train Peace Corps staff and volunteers on potential issues that LGBTQ volunteers face to promote sensitivity and a supportive environment. For more information, feel free to email at spectrum.pc.ecuador@gmail.com. Feel free to join our Facebook group!

FREE

What is FREE? It is a working diversity group that allows its members to offer support to one another. FREE is an acronym that stands for *Fomentando Relaciones Étnicas y Éticas*. Our mission is to promote understanding, respect, and acceptance of the ethnic and religious differences that exist within the Peace Corps Ecuador community and the country we serve.

FREE was formed by volunteers serving in Omnibus 106 when they realized there was a need for a diversity support group and none in operation. With the permission and support of the Country Director (Parmer Heacox at the time), FREE was born.

Before its original members completed their service and returned to the United States, FREE created a manual designed primarily to aid Peace Corps Volunteers (PCVs) in educating others about American culture and the Ecuadorian culture as well. The manual outlines ideas and activities for hosting events on American or Ecuadorian holidays. It also offers PCVs ideas on activities to do that encourage its participants to consider diversity.

During each new omnibus's training, FREE members work with staff and volunteers to address the different needs of volunteers that arise from belonging to a specific ethnic or religious minority group.

FREE meets about three times a year to discuss ethnic or religious minority issues, with a focus on specific issues that its members have experienced or are experiencing while in Ecuador. Each meeting, FREE members offer support and share their culture with each other.

Staff Bios



Alex Tinajero

Position on staff: IT Specialist

Occupation before joining Peace Corps: IT stuff...

Reason for joining the Peace Corps family: It is and has always been a great place to be.

What would you like to say to all PCVs in Ecuador?: Be safe and enjoy your time here.

One interesting fact about yourself: I love to play football, a Liga de Quito fan. I lived in Idaho for one year in college.



Greg Jacobs

Position on staff: Director of Programs and Training

Occupation before joining Peace Corps: Worked for Chemonics International implementing USAID projects

Reason for joining the Peace Corps family: I wanted to get back to grassroots development and live overseas again.

What would you like to say to all PCVs in Ecuador?: Thanks for all you do as Peace Corps Volunteers! It is wonderful to see all the projects and commitments in volunteers in all of our programs.

One interesting fact about yourself: I grew up in Chicago and love all things Chicagoan except for the long winters!



Alexis Vaughn

Position on staff: Country Director

Occupation before joining Peace Corps: Vice President-Management & CFO, The Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, Kansas City, MO

Reason for joining the Peace Corps family: I had been working internationally for several years, but I decided to return home after 9/11. After 12 years of working domestically, I got the itch to work overseas again, as a returned Peace Corps Volunteer (Honduras '85-'87) Peace Corps was a kind of homecoming for me.

What would you like to say to all PCVs in Ecuador?: PC Ecuador Rocks!

Staff Bios



Brittanie Paquette

Position on staff: Director of Management and Operations

Occupation before joining Peace Corps: I have been with Peace Corps since I was evacuated from PC/Bolivia in 2008. Before that, I was a real estate title closer for a Title Company in Colorado.

Reason for joining the Peace Corps family: I knew from a young age I wanted to go into Peace Corps. I met my husband and we talked about PC on our first date. My husband's parents were volunteers in the '70s in Colombia which also added to the desire to go abroad.

What would you like to say to all PCVs in Ecuador?: I would say—enjoy your time here. Some days are hard and the time seems to be creeping by, but it's one of those experiences in your life that will mold where you go from here. Also, take advantage of being down here and travel to other countries! It's hard to come back and make the time once you get a job/get married/have kids.



Irene Merizalde

Position on staff: Receptionist

Occupation before joining Peace Corps: I had a factory that made bobby pins and chalk with sales all over Ecuador. I worked at a photography studio.

Reason for joining the Peace Corps family: I like the cultural diversity of the Peace Corps, which I have learned a lot from and I am very appreciative with PCV's work because they share their knowledge with the people of my country.

What would you like to say to all PCVs in Ecuador?: Be patient from the beginning of your service, and your positive attitude is important in your daily activities.

One interesting fact about yourself: During my free time, I love to watch movies and dance salsa. I love poems and anything by Carlos Cuauhtémoc Sánchez.